

21 August 1975

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Meeker, Barry

NATO Radar Penetrated by Air Rescue

By Michael Getler

Washington Post Foreign Service

BONN, Aug. 20—The dramatic helicopter pickup of three East Germans inside Czechoslovakia last Sunday by a civilian U.S. pilot has touched off considerable behind-the-scenes concern among American and NATO officials.

The pilot, identified as Barry Meeker, 34, apparently managed to elude NATO radar monitoring systems that are constantly focused along West Germany's frontiers with Eastern Europe, probably the most heavily defended in the world.

Although there were conflicting reports about just how many times Meeker made similar flights, he claims to have done it on at least two occasions. This means he crossed and recrossed NATO's most sensitive front lines undetected at least six times.

The episode has touched off an investigation about how Meeker was able to make these flights and completely elude NATO's high-power radar surveillance network and ground border patrols, sources said.

The helicopter Meeker was flying was a small one and undoubtedly he was able to fly low and underneath the electronic eyes of the radar. Darting around mountain areas to elude radar would also make detection difficult.

The affair raises important questions for NATO countries that have invested

billions of dollars in a variety of electronic monitoring systems designed to detect all kinds of activity along the frontiers with Eastern Europe.

U.S. officials here say they have no information on Meeker or his whereabouts. The pilot checked out of the Traunstein City Hospital in Bavaria today and left no forwarding address. According to a telephone operator at the hospital Meeker left with "some friends."

It is unofficially reported that Meeker has decided to sell the rights to his personal story to the West German picture magazine Stern and will give no further free interviews.

U.S. officials here say that the episode caught them by surprise but that they were able to determine quickly that Meeker was not an employee of the CIA.

Many questions were raised by his activities. Meeker reportedly was not registered with the U.S. consular office in Munich, near where he reportedly worked for a West German helicopter rescue service. Registration with the consulate is not mandatory but is normal for Americans employed in that area.

Unauthorized crossing of the borders here is illegal but there were no immediate indications that Meeker faces charges.

Officials also indicated they had no information on the whereabouts of the three East Germans—two

men and a 14-year-old girl—whom Meeker lifted out of Czechoslovakia in his small craft.

Earlier, news agencies that interviewed Meeker by telephone in the hospital reported:

Meeker said he had received \$4,000 for each of his flights to Czechoslovakia, but denied that the payments were fees.

"These were guarantees in case anything would happen to me, that my family would be all right, my family to be; I'm engaged," he said.

"I've noticed negative comments in the press that I'm simply a soldier of fortune... selling my services in each one. But what people don't realize is that each one took about two months and during these two months I was not employed, I earned no money at all."

Czechoslovakian authorities today gave a West German official in Prague a protest over the violation of Czech frontiers by Meeker's helicopter.

Meeker underwent surgery for hip and elbow wounds he suffered when Czechoslovak guards opened fire as he was loading his passengers.

Talking of the previous rescue flights, Meeker said he had made them at this time last year, one on Aug. 15 and the other Aug. 17. He said he had brought out four refugees on each of the 1974 flights.

Meeker said that he expected to lose his license to fly in Germany, but he added: "It doesn't matter if



BARRY MEEKER
... \$4,000 a trip

I lose my license or not—one will ever lend me a helicopter again.

He said he doubted that criminal charges will be pressed. "I think some steps will be taken, but more of a hand-slapping nature than of a heads-must-roll nature," he said.

Meeker's lawyer said Meeker had returned to West Germany several weeks ago from Istanbul, Iran, where he was training pilot's of the shah's army.

Meeker said that he was born in Hartford, Conn., and raised in New York City, but that his family now lives in Wakefield, R.I.

His father, William Meeker, said he was "stunned at first" when he heard of his son's exploits. "But after I thought about it I wasn't surprised," he said.

One of the pilot's two younger brothers, Craig, said that before Barry Meeker enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1966 he had been rather apolitical.